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Secretary-General's bulletin

Flexible working arrangements

As indicated in my report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387), it is time to align the work practices of the Secretariat with those of many national civil services and other parts of the United Nations system by offering more flexible working arrangements leading to a better balance between the professional and personal lives of the staff of the Secretariat.

To that effect, from 1 February 2003, flexible working arrangements may be authorized in all departments and offices of the Secretariat.

This will be done using the following guiding principles:

- Programme managers and staff are encouraged to rethink the manner in which the work is currently performed and how it could be done in different and better ways for all concerned by using flexible working arrangements;
- All arrangements are at the discretion of the head of department/office, who will authorize them, taking into account the needs of service, including the needs of clients or users, and the needs of the staff members;
- There is no right or entitlement to flexible working arrangements. They require a specific agreement and are purely voluntary for all concerned;
- In determining whether to approve individual arrangements, heads of departments or offices are expected to exercise their managerial discretion and judgement in a reasonable manner. Certain types of flexible working arrangements may not be possible for some jobs. Similarly, increased demands and requirements may lead to suspension of flexible working arrangements at certain periods, for instance when an intergovernmental body serviced by a particular office is in session. The task of the head of department/office is to optimize for the Organization and the staff the benefits of flexibility, while minimizing potential problems;
- Productivity and quality of outputs must be maintained at the same level, or enhanced, following the introduction of flexible working arrangements;
- No extra costs may be incurred by the Organization as a result of flexible working arrangements.

03-22355 (E) 280103

As of 1 February 2003, the options under flexible working arrangements are as follows:

Option 1: Staggered working hours

Under this option, staff members are expected to be present during a core period of the working day. The core period will be set at each duty station. Staff must complete the balance of working hours for each day before, after, or partly before and partly after, the core period;

Option 2: Compressed work schedule: ten working days in nine

Under this option, all the hours that would normally have been worked during a period of ten working days are compressed into nine working days by distributing among these nine days the hours that would otherwise have been worked on the tenth day. This redistribution of normal working hours allows staff members, every other week, to take off the last day of the normal work week;

Option 3: Scheduled break for external learning activities

Staff members wishing to attend courses relevant to their professional development at universities or other institutions of learning may request breaks of up to three hours per day for a maximum of two days per week. The hours spent away from work during a particular week must be made up during that week;

Option 4: Work away from the office (telecommuting)

Where consistent with the nature of the work involved, staff members may spend up to two days per week working from an alternative work site, provided they have access to the necessary equipment and may always be reached by telephone or e-mail.

All these arrangements will be adjusted to local conditions, as necessary.

Use of flexible working arrangements will require careful planning and preparation on the part of all concerned. The Office of Human Resources Management and local human resources offices will provide guidance, including model individual agreements for the newer type of flexible arrangements, to ensure the success of this important initiative.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**
Secretary-General